

Belief has to start somewhere. You need a basic belief. Should your belief in God be basic?

DO YOU NEED EVIDENCE TO BELIEVE IN GOD OR NOT?

Think of a belief you have. See how it is based on something else you believe or a number of beliefs. Then each of these beliefs depends on a belief or beliefs too. That cannot go on endlessly. Belief has to stop somewhere. Or it is better to say it has to start somewhere. Believers in God say the best way to start and the wisest is to start with belief in God. They see God as a basic belief, the belief the others come out of and depend on.

Not all think this basic belief is to be believed with no evidence. Evidence, if there is a God, will surely be a gift from God. There would be no true respect for God if you believe and don't care about the evidence.

Some say God is to be believed without evidence. They say evidence does not matter even if there is evidence. What you need is to believe in a God of truth before you can trust anything at all. So belief in evidence then depends on belief in God. Belief in belief depends on God. Belief itself depends on God.

The Bible imagines it gives evidence for God and for being his word. It thus certainly denies that God is basic.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE GOODNESS OF BLIND FAITH IN GOD

Some say faith without evidence is no big deal for it is harmless. There is no such thing as a harmless blind or illogical belief. Even the most secret one is a lie you tell yourself. It is pretending to be sensible while being everything but that. When you lie to yourself like that, what business have you looking for others to trust you? It can only lead to you becoming a thief and a liar and a manipulative wretch.

People will say that if you have a friend who you believe in despite the overwhelming evidence that he did something terrible then it still makes sense to believe in him. This is hailed as an example of rational faith that is against the evidence. But if you don't know the friend well it would be irrational faith. Your rejection of the overwhelming evidence is not based on a refusal to look at the evidence but because you know him well enough to know that he did not do what he was accused of. You are saying the evidence is overridden by the evidence of his words and actions which you are familiar with. You are saying that there has been a mistake somewhere in the evidence against him. You are not preferring the lesser evidence to the greater. It is never right to prefer it.

Some say that blind faith is fine for if you wait until you verify everything before you believe you will believe nothing or not very much. This is an argument that only would appeal to people who were too sceptical of the existence of evidence. We are not expecting everybody to prove everything before they believe it. We are asking them to get what evidence they can.

Some object that belief in reason is a blind belief and that since it is good blind belief is not wrong. "Your mind might not be programmed right so you are not sure of your reason", they say. But if it is blind, then that does not mean that other kinds of blind belief are good. When to believe in reason and not to believe are both beliefs or reason trying to work out probability what can we do but believe in reason? If I believe in God and say this has nothing to do with reason I am lying. My belief in God is against reason for it is a blind belief. That remains true even if my belief in reason itself is a blind belief for it is not against reason to blindly believe in reason.

Others ask how you can believe in evidence and that what you see around you is real when it could be a dream? But I know it is not a dream for I know what dreams are like. They are not as real as what is around me and they are frequently absurd.

Perhaps if blind belief makes religious people better people and makes them happier they are doing right? But in that case they should keep their blind beliefs to themselves. They should not give bad example with supporting religion or a religious doctrine. They should not let blind belief or blind faith influence their lives in an obviously religious way like distributing Bibles but simply induce nice spiritual thrills. And since to offend truth is to scorn love and compassion and life which cannot exist without truth it is never right to espouse blind faith. And when they are able to take comfort from faked faith they should be able to take comfort without it.

The argument that blind religious faith keeps people moral is a political one. The government does not care how revoltingly silly you are as long as your silliness keeps you obeying the law.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE RATIONALITY OF BLIND FAITH

When you have no reason to doubt something that means that it is likely to be true as far as your reason is concerned even if reality says different for you don't know what reality says. We have no reason to doubt reason or what we sense. They are always right. If I make a mistake and think that $5+5=11$ my reason is right but I am using the wrong kind of reason.

So experience and reason are their own evidence. Anthony Kenny rejects this. According to him, a person cannot be his own witness. "Nothing can provide evidence for itself, any more than a witness can corroborate his own story. So evident propositions are believed without evidence" (page 9, What is Faith?). This is wrong. When a person gives a testimony you have to take it as likely to be true unless something proves that it is not. More people tell the truth than what lie. If Kenny is right then there is no such thing as evidence and his belief in rational belief which he gets from reason and experience has no evidence for it.

This error is the reason why he says that there is no evidence or justification for the belief that only what has good evidence should be believed. Thus he is accusing the definition of faith as seeing what the evidence says to be probably true of being self-refuting or contradictory.

Kenny, like Plantinga, says that a belief is rational only if it is self-evident, can be shown to be true by the senses or memory and by argument or experiment (page 20). We agree with this but we reject his view that belief in this criteria has no justification. And he does not believe that a self-evident truth is certain but is only a guess. He thinks the guesses need to be made for or without them we will know nothing anyway! It is irrational to have reason just because you think you need it. Needing something does not make it correct. Then you have it only because you need it and not because it is rational so Kenny is not rational at all. We can live without believing anything and say that we live normal lives just because we do or are programmed to and for no reason. Or you can say that everything you experience may be trickery and illusion and your memory may be continually being altered so you don't know what is real but you just go along with the illusion in case it is real. So, the notion of needing faith making faith logical is totally wrong.

If we are just guessing that reason and experience are reliable then we believe in nothing except that there is no evidence. If we say we believe in something then we are kidding ourselves. We are just guessing not reasoning.

The criteria says that evidence shows something to be likely to be true but it can't do that unless there is evidence for itself and it verifies itself.

Kenny says it is clearly rational to believe things like reason is right though there is no evidence for this belief or evidence for what is self-evident (page 9). But it is not rational for it does not come from reason but from not thinking but guessing. He is merely assuming this not thinking this. You can't prove by reason that reason is right if you think there is no evidence. But at least if you say reason is true for reason says so it is more reasonable than saying reason is true because I think or guess that it is true. If we use circular reasoning to verify reason then we must keep thoughts and guesses and especially feelings out of it and keep the focus on reason. Reason backs up reason and to use anything else or anything additional is being unreasonable.

Plantinga and Anthony Kenny are in agreement that the idea that rational belief is based on evidence and sees the evidence as it is, is wrong (page 18, What is Faith?).

Kenny believes that it is not credulity but rationality to believe that you are awake now and not dreaming, that people die and that Australia exists though you have no evidence (page 13). That is something like Plantinga would say. Kenny says the existence of Australia is not based on evidence for you have never been there and is still a reasonable belief. In brief, anything you don't experience is not based on evidence. The reasons for this position are that seeing Australia on maps and having friends there, is weak evidence and that my reasons for believing in Australia have been forgotten and twisted and altered in my memory. What is wrong with this is his presupposition that testimony is not evidence or good evidence. That is an extreme doctrine. If it is true, then anything I remember might not be a memory at all for it is me testifying to myself that such and such has happened. Perhaps I dreamed something and mistook it for a memory or maybe I have ignored evidence against it and forgotten I have done this. People do lie but they should be believed when there is no reason to think that they are lying. And it is not disbelief to check them out first for your attitude could be, "I trust them but since trust is not full certainty I am entitled to make sure if I want to". Even if the evidence for Australia and things in the same category is weak evidence it is still evidence.

We do have evidence for Australia. For instance, why would everybody make up Australia? If there is no evidence for these things then there is no evidence at all. It is alarming that great minds can be so far wrong. Do they believe in evidence? If they don't is that why they say such wrong things?

Even if all or most belief is blind and is still rational there will still be beliefs that are more rational to blindly believe than others just like some absurdities are sillier and more irrational than others. It will be more rational to believe in recent memories than in ones further back. If they are believed without reasons then it follows that it is irrational to trust last week and before's memories in serious matters at all. So the doctor must prefer going through the medical diary instead of letting memory dictate what to do in an emergency. By the time the info is obtained the person will be dead! Even though memories are most probably right the doctor cannot take the risk of killing the patient with the wrong treatment when he has no reason for trusting in memory at all. Plantinga and Kenny believe that evidence exists but how can it when all evidence is perceived by the memory and the memory is you testifying to yourself that something has happened when they reject testimony as evidence on its own? Plantinga and Kenny need to accept the traditional views that there are self-evident truths that are their own reason for believing in them and that rational belief is apportioned to the evidence.

Plantinga and Kenny have developed their beliefs about rational belief in the hope that what most people want to be rational belief is made rational belief for they feel it is too strict to ask people to believe whatever has the most evidence for it.

It is mad to say we should believe because we need beliefs. It is better to hold that if we need beliefs we will have them and they can't come out of nowhere we need to have reasons for our beliefs.

It is mad to say that it is reasonable to believe because we need beliefs for reasonable implies that there must be reasons that we have for holding these beliefs to be true that show they are true or probably true.

Needing to know anything does not imply that we know it if we believe it. I can rationally believe something that is in fact untrue therefore I can think I need to know something and be wrong. And why should I listen to anybody telling me I am wrong when they have no reasons for their own beliefs? What sense does it make for Kenny to tell me it is rational to believe in Australia if I have no evidence for it when I don't need that belief? He is really saying belief in Australia is reasonable for Australia exists. But against this we must remember that one can have reasonable faith in something that is false. Many say that if I believe in what surrounds me and is adjacent to me then that is all I need. Others say that is unacceptable for it is not enough. Religious people want you to believe that it is more important that you accept that Jesus died on the cross and rose again than that you believe the fire you set in the morning can burn you. Religious belief is certainly well within the category of belief that isn't necessary.

Anthony Kenny holds that circular reasoning or belief without evidence (which is the same thing) is a rational basis for faith if it is about what is called self-evident, something that the senses and memory say is fact or something that can be defended by argument, investigation or experimentation. So, if I say that science is true because nature does not change and perform an experiment that proves these, I can say that nature does not change for science is true and my experiment is true for nature does not change. This is a vicious circle with an experiment or support in it so this would be the best and most rational form of a vicious circle. Its form is, "Science verifies X and X verifies science because science is true".

So, according to Kenny everything then is believed without reasons when belief without reason is the reason for believing in it. This leads to the absurdity of saying this is a reason for believing this and that is a reason for believing that but how can they be reasons when there is no reason why they are reasons?

The sceptic thinks that nothing can be known. The sceptic doesn't believe in reason or the senses or anything at all. The sceptic is supposed to believe that there is no possibility of believing or knowing anything apart from this belief. The sceptic has a reason for this belief and it is that nothing can prove itself to him. Scepticism is actually better than Plantinga and Kenny's system for at least it has a reason for its foundational idea. Plantinga and Kenny can't think of any reason for verifying their foundational idea that reason and the senses are valid conveyers of truth.

Some say that you need an infinity of arguments to prove anything. To prove a cat exists you need to prove that it had a mother and you need to prove the mother exists and so on and on. But if you can prove reason and you don't need an infinite regress of arguments to do that then every belief you have will rest on the foundation of reason. Reason will be the centre and it proves itself and everything comes out of it like spokes on a bicycle wheel.

If the criteria given by Kenny is right and there is no justification for it then it follows that the more reasons that can be thought for the defence of the criteria the better. It is better than nothing. The more reasons the better. This would imply that an infinite trail of arguments is necessary. But we cannot do this for we are only finite creatures.

The criteria does not absolve anybody from the duty to provide evidence and demolish the evidence against what is probably true except in regard to the criteria itself.

EXPLANATION

If you want to believe in something without evidence you have to show that it is the best explanation not just for you but is really is the best explanation.

In that case you are putting explanation not belief first.

An idea that is not testable such as that a God made all things can never be the best explanation. It cannot be an attempt at an explanation at all. It is just a guess. You may not have evidence for a particular explanation being true but you still need evidence that it could be true.

Everything makes us seek explanations. The questions are there but they cannot be answered for we cannot know all the facts. Only evidence can answer the question but often we are not able to see it all or understand it all or even get it all. Non-testable stuff prevents us seeing and getting it. It prevents us from caring.

Is it true that we believe something for a mixture of reasons? Some reasons will be rational ones or logical ones, others will be emotional or personal reasons. The answer then is yes. The more a belief on the basis of evidence depends on evidence the more rational you are likely to be.

IS GOD A BASIC BELIEF?

Plantinga and McGrath believe that the only way that belief in God can be rational if there is no evidence for God is if God is a basic belief. They agree that we can give no reasons why reason and the senses and the memory and science can be true so they are believed in without reasons and because we need to believe them for if we don't we will psychologically know and believe nothing. Plantinga thinks that God is a basic belief because if there is a good God who has made us then we can depend on reason and the senses and memory and on science for he is honest and has made them reliable for he created them. But belief in a force that made things evolve and which is as impersonal as electricity and which cannot mislead us would be a better idea for it is simpler and there is no need for a good God. This power would not be God. One can simply believe that the senses are real and have taught us reason. You know that when you see blue you really see blue even if the blue object does not exist and is an illusion so you know you should trust the senses. This is wiser than complicating things with a God you cannot give evidence for.

If you believe in this God in order that you may ground your faith in reason etc then God is not God to you. You have him for grounding reason and not for himself. Plantinga then needs to realise that unbelief in God is the way to ground it. At least it avoids the contradiction of a good God who wants you to use him in the name of morality. That would not be morality but a lie.

Plantinga has no right to say that God is a basic belief when he has not dealt with the evidence against God. It is one thing to say that it is okay to believe in a God without reasons if it is a basic belief but it is another to say it is okay to do this and not look at all the evidences against God first. He declared that attempts to prove God did not provide evidence for God but warrant for God. He defined warrant as the inclination to believe in God and argued that this inclination was placed in us by God and it justifies belief in God for it is like God telling us through our needs that he exists. So if you are inclined to believe in God then you can rationally believe that God exists (page 70, What is Faith?). But most people have not believed in his kind of all-good God. And the same could be said to prove the existence of the tooth fairy. What about those who have no such inclination? It is more proper to say we have an inclination to believe in the possibility of a happy life after death. The more you doubt the existence of God the less inclination you have to believe in God so Plantinga's theory does not help the case for God at all.

The conflict between the existence of evil and the existence of an all-good God which religion says is a mystery and cannot be completely solved means that God is beyond good and evil for he causes both not that it is a mystery. Why? Because it is less of a mystery for God to be beyond them. That gets rid of the mystery. Kenny agrees (page 88, What is Faith?). This thing is ignored by Christians and Plantinga does just that.

Blind faith in God is the worst form of blind faith. It is very extreme for it is about the biggest thing imaginable. What could be bigger than God?

APPENDIX - PRESUPPOSITIONALISM, A QUOTE

I believed that all our arguments are finally based on assumptions— notions to which we are fundamentally committed. In short, they are pretheoretical. But our conscious or even unconscious commitment to them need not be blind. And when we discover we have made these commitments, we need not be constantly in doubt, as if it were the power of our will to believe that gives us confidence that our commitments are well placed. In fact, if we work at it, we can discover what our pretheoretical commitments are, and we can determine whether they are likely to be sound. One way is to argue to a best explanation.

Reason if it is based on presuppositions seems to weaken reason. It seems to fail to give it the foundation it wants. In fact reason is so good that if anything deserves presuppositions that back it up then it does. It is a far stronger affirmation of reason than reason proving reason to be the right method (if it could) would be!